

**STUDY OF THE IMPACTS OF
SCHOOL SAFETY LEGISLATION**

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prepared for

The Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee

prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

The 1997 Washington State Legislature took action related to ensuring school safety in E2SHB 1841, a bill that seeks to improve exchange of information about safety risks posed by individual students as well as to increase the capacity for schools and teachers to address these risks and related problems. The Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee is responsible for studying the impacts of this legislation, and contracted with Praxis Research to conduct the study. Praxis Research is a private firm specializing in research on adolescent problem behaviors.

The Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee set forth seven purposes for this study:

- To examine school safety legislation to determine the impact of the new legislation on courts, schools, and youth;
- To examine the impact on courts regarding having to notify schools of students enrolled in their school that have been convicted in adult court or adjudicated or entered into a diversion agreement pursuant to E2SHB 1841;
- To examine the impact on schools regarding having to notify every teacher of the student(s) convicted in an adult court or adjudicated or entered into a diversion agreement pursuant to E2SHB 1841;
- To examine suspensions, expulsions and other disciplinary actions, taken in each school district across the state;
- To examine policies adopted by school boards that restore discipline to the classroom and how they have been implemented;
- To examine what programs and/or appropriate educational opportunities are provided to expelled or suspended students; and
- To recommend areas for possible change in the future, for example, legislative, program, policy, and so forth.

The study design called for collection of information about the legislation's impacts from schools and juvenile courts through a series of surveys timed to cover the 18-month study period.

More recent and widely publicized events involving school violence have added to the concerns that generated the 1997 legislation. The original methodology planned for the evaluation was

modified to incorporate the resulting increase in public attention, additional legislative and local initiatives, and a heightened level of activity to ensure safety in schools throughout the state.

BACKGROUND

The School Safety Improvements legislation encompassed in E2SHB 1841 was premised on the belief that “the children of this state have the right to an effective public education and that both students and educators have the need to be safe and secure in the classroom if learning is to occur.” The legislation called attention to what was then seen to be an increasing problem of school violence and threat to the safety of children during the school day. These risks were attributed to the prevalence of weapons on campus, gang-related apparel and appeal, and student use and sales of alcohol and other drugs on school property. The school safety legislation was designed to improve the capacity for schools to ensure that disruptive behavior does not “...continue to divert attention, time, and resources from educational activities.” The legislation proposed to resolve these problems by providing educators with the authority to restore discipline and safety in the classroom and better control the conduct of students on campus.

E2SHB 1841 gave schools several tools with which to accomplish these ends. The study identified and focused on four central aspects of the legislation. These significantly changed the ways in which school staff learned about potentially violent students and provided or underscored the authority of teachers and school administrators to take appropriate action. These four critical aspects are summarized as follows:

- **Information** - access to information about a student’s previous or present involvement in violent and related problem behavior. The legislation provided for school principals to receive information from the juvenile court and from a transferring student’s previous school. From the courts, principals were to be informed whenever a student at the school was convicted in adult court or adjudicated or entered into a diversion agreement for various violent and drug/alcohol offences. The principals were, in turn, directed to notify that student’s teachers and other applicable school staff. For transferring students, principals may request disciplinary records from the former school.
- **Right to Take Disciplinary Actions** – rights of school administrators and teachers to take actions necessary to control disruptive students. The legislation provided authority for teachers to discipline disruptive students, and should disruption continue, to remove disruptive students from the classroom. Principals may use long-term suspension or expulsion as disciplinary actions for students who repeatedly disrupt classes as well as those who were convicted, adjudicated, or diverted for the listed violent and drug/alcohol offenses.
- **Policies to Support Disciplinary Actions** – the above rights for teachers and administrators to take actions to control or remove disruptive or violent students were to be incorporated in and supported by local school district policies.
- **School Safety Plans** – building-level disciplinary standards and written procedures necessary to carry out these policies should be developed for each school within the district.

Other elements of E2SHB 1841 included clarification of the definition of gang membership and the authority to suspend or expel students for gang activity, including intimidation, on school

grounds. Other language underscored the rights of school authorities to order persons to leave the campus when they are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs or creating a disturbance. The legislation also discussed school uniforms and dress codes. These specific elements of the legislation are important for underscoring a school administrator's rights to control behaviors on campus, and compliment similar rights provided through other laws and regulations.

The escalation of school violence that preceded the legislation did not stop with its adoption in 1997. While some issues – such as gang activity – have appeared to decline in significance for reasons not necessarily linked to the legislation, other aspects of school violence and student safety have become of even greater public concern. The violence at Columbine High School in Colorado in the spring of 1999 raised the level of this concern throughout the country. Other incidents of school violence subsequent to Columbine kept this awareness high, and supported a trend of the need for additional actions to protect students and school staff.

In Washington State as elsewhere, public policy makers, school boards and administrators, as well as teachers, other school staff, parents, and students, have again focused attention on how to best prevent and intervene in school violence. This past September, at the start of the 1999-2000 school year, the State Attorney General and the Superintendent of Public Instruction distributed a safety guide to principals of all the state's schools. The guide included information on developing school violence and crisis response plans, covered exchanges of information between schools and law enforcement agencies, and reviewed a school's legal rights regarding disciplinary actions.

It is very clear that E2SHB 1841 and its implementation have not been alone in influencing perceptions of school safety or in stimulating actions in the interest of reductions in school violence. The legislation is one of several factors that have led to changes in the state's schools and how they deal with disruptive students, and many of the actions taken to address school violence are too recent to have had any impacts. Given this broad and general impetus and the developing nature of responses, the methodology for this evaluation was designed to track a range of school safety changes and effects. Questions about the legislation and its primary aspects shaped and dominated the study design but information was also necessarily collected on other initiatives. There were multiple and often unstated rationales for action in addition to the state law, making impossible the direct attribution of impact to this legislation. It is also apparent that responses to school safety concerns are still being formulated, and are likely to further change the climate within which the 1997 legislation is operating.

METHODOLOGY

The outline of the study's purpose called for collection of information on impacts from two separate systems - the public schools and the juvenile courts. The timeframe of the study permitted two years of school data to be collected for review - 1997-98 and 1998-99 – providing some capacity to assess changes over time.

The original study design for collection of school data called for two surveys of school districts – one in 1998 covering the 1997-98 school year, and the second in 1999 for the 1998-99 school year. Information from County Juvenile Services and Juvenile Courts was collected in a separate survey at a single point in 1999, asking at that time for perceived impacts pre-and post the 1997 legislation, cost impact estimates, as well as any problems encountered in implementation. The schedule of the information collection was intended to provide sufficient time for juvenile justice staff to have experienced and developed some accommodation to the legislative requirements.

The schedule for the school surveys was developed in response to the desire to obtain comparative data to assess changes in disciplinary reports following the legislation. The study design noted that statistical data were not expected to be available to permit such a comparison at most sites due to varied reporting formats and the lack of any formal requirements for the content of such records. The 1998 survey of school districts found that the expectation of poor information on disciplinary actions was an accurate one, with responding districts submitting data in several different formats and clearly using different definitions of reporting needs. The only real analysis that could be made of these data was the observation that larger districts had proportionately more reports than smaller ones, and that very small districts and those serving only elementary-aged students often had no reports of disciplinary actions at all.

These findings made the intended repeat survey in 1999 of the state's school districts a poor use of limited project resources. Given the results from the first survey, a second survey would not produce data that could show change over time, and was considered unlikely to provide more or better information about disciplinary instances than the first one. At the same time, there were compelling reasons to collect information about how individual schools had responded to school safety concerns and what aspects of the legislation had been helpful. Heightened national and state attention to problems of school violence had changed the climate for this study and for school safety actions. These changes had been most meaningful at the middle school/junior high and high school level, where students were older and more likely to engage in violent actions. School principals rather than district administrators would be most knowledgeable about the effects of the legislation. The 1999 Juvenile Court Survey findings also raised several important questions about how schools were using and distributing data released by the courts that could only be addressed at the individual school level.

The evaluation contract was amended to allow the third and final survey planned for the Study of the Impacts of School Safety Legislation to use a selected sample of middle schools/junior highs and senior high schools. This survey utilized a selected sample to ensure approximately equal representation from large and small schools, urban and rural communities, and Eastern and Western Washington. The survey was completed by school principals or, at their discretion, by vice principals (responsible for discipline in larger schools). The questionnaire design included follow-up of information from the 1998 school district survey and from the findings of the Juvenile Court Survey; it also included questions on recent events, responses to other actions since the study legislation, and perceived needs for other legislative assistance.

The procedures for conduct of the mailed surveys utilized "The Total Design Method" developed by Don Dillman (1978). These procedures are the research standard for achieving good results

with mail surveys, and have been extensively field-tested and documented for their effectiveness - they generally produce an acceptable response rate of better than 50%. The method followed in this study included a brief cover letter outlining the reasons for the request, the benefits of the findings, and a date for return; the questionnaire form; and a stamped return envelope. All survey recipients were sent a follow-up postcard one week later, thanking them for their response or requesting that they complete their forms. Juvenile Courts who did not respond in a set period following the postcard reminder were contacted by telephone and, when reached, offered the option of receiving a replacement questionnaire or doing the survey over the telephone.

All quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS-PC+, a statistical package for the social sciences. These analyses included frequency statistics and comparisons across different enrollment categories and school types. Narrative or qualitative data were typed, reviewed and sorted by topical category and theme, and summarized with illustrating quotations according to their major content areas.

SURVEY RESPONSE

Characteristics of Responding School Districts: In late October 1998, a questionnaire was sent to each Superintendent of Washington State's 296 school districts. A total of 148 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 50%. There was at least one school district responding from all of the state's 39 counties, and the distribution of returns was fairly evenly divided between districts located in the eastern and western portions of the state – 47% and 53% respectively.

Respondents included both very small, rural, districts serving only elementary-aged students as well as suburban and urban comprehensive districts on both sides of the state, including several of the state's largest school districts. A majority of the responses came from districts with fewer than 1,000 students – this is similar to the distribution of all districts in the state, and suggests that the responses were broadly representative of the state's schools overall. Urban districts in the Puget Sound area, including the state's largest district –Seattle - were poorly represented in the returns, and this may have affected the representativeness of responses for this sub-group. To compensate for this, key survey questions were analyzed according to student enrollment. Thirty-two percent of the responses came from districts with "very small" enrollments of 368 or fewer students; 20% came from districts classed as "small," with enrollment of 401 to 1009 students. In contrast, 18% of the responses were from "medium" sized districts, with 1200 to 2555 students; 19% from "medium-large" districts, enrolling 2698 to 9021 students; and 10% from "large" districts, with 10,388 to 32,751 students.

Characteristics of Responding Individual Schools: In late October 1999, a questionnaire was sent to the principals of a selected sample of 325 Washington State schools. The sample included only middle schools, junior highs and high schools (including alternative schools), and was drawn to incorporate both large and small schools located throughout the state. A total of 319 schools received the questionnaires; 106 middle/junior high schools, 162 high schools; and 51 alternative schools.

A total of 182 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 57%: return rate by school type was 54% (57) for middle schools/junior highs, 62% (100) from high schools, and 47% (24) from alternative schools. Surveys were returned from schools in all of the state's 39 counties. The distribution of returns somewhat favored schools located in the western portions of the state with 57% of respondents from the west-side and 43% from eastern Washington.

The enrollment of the schools represented in the returns ranged from very small (12) to very large (2492). Overall, the average enrollment of responding schools was 690; the median was 525. The 24 alternative schools tended to have the fewest students, with a median enrollment of 150. The median enrollments of middle school/junior high and high school respondents was similar – 550 and 571 – but the larger schools in the returns were all high schools, and 25% of the high schools had more than 1300 students.

Characteristics of Responding Juvenile Courts: In late April 1999, a questionnaire was sent to the administrator of the Juvenile Court for each of Washington State's 39 counties. A total of 36 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 92%. Juvenile Courts in King, Yakima, and Whitman Counties did not return responses despite repeated contacts and requests. Combined courts serve Benton and Franklin Counties, and Ferry, Pend Orielle, and Stevens Counties – each responded and was counted separately by individual county.

The study extended over a period of eighteen months, a length that allowed collection of data over a period of time and in reference to two school years – 1997-98 and 1998-99. Although the sources of information about the implementation of the legislation in schools were district administrators in 1998 and school principals in 1999, the survey results indicate progress in how thoroughly and how well schools and courts are responding to the law and its intent. They also demonstrate the continuation of certain school safety concerns and implementation difficulties. The timing of the court survey – mid-way between the two school surveys – serves best to show where juvenile justice and school perspectives overlap or diverge.

The sequencing of the three surveys also contributed to the findings. Issues or questions raised in one survey were added to or used to modify the questions utilized in the subsequent one. Thus, while some questions were repeated in each survey, others differed and were designed to build on answers to questions given in a previous set of survey responses. This iterative and developmental approach was utilized to explore several key issues that were not originally part of the study design. These included considerable variation in reporting methods by juvenile courts and concerns about possible violations of confidentiality. These are reflected in the following discussion of the study's findings.

FINDINGS

Many of the comments of the school district administrators expressed appreciation for these legislative actions, citing them as helping “legitimize the district’s position.” “Legislative action put teeth in our handbook,” wrote one respondent, an effect characterized by another as giving schools “the buck stops here” support. The following comment describes the actions as “helpful because they focus attention on the problem. The focus helps schools recognize the need to have strong appropriate policies to deal with student discipline.” Other school district administrators cited the legislation’s value in raising the public’s awareness; still others in dealing with parents.

Individual school respondents also welcomed the Legislature’s actions, as expressed by this principal: “I think they are a step in the right direction. Eliminating students from the campus when their agenda is something other than education is very important for the safety of the majority.” Another principal stressed how the legislation assisted the schools to take action, writing how “I feel the legislation is helpful. It has given us more clout with students and parents.” Several respondents remarked on the legislation’s contributions to the “sharing of information between schools and other schools as well as juvenile justice.”

Favorable comments from Juvenile Court administrators further reflected on how the legislation was a positive step, with one such respondent noting “I believe any amount of information is helpful to provide safety to our schools and community.” Wrote another “I think they’re helpful. I believe we need to make our schools aware for safety issues.” One county included responses from several staff, providing a varied set of reactions. Commenting on lack of funding, this respondent nonetheless concluded: “improved communication (cooperation) between schools and juvenile courts should contribute to improved school safety/reduced violence.” Wrote another: “Anytime people working with kids know more about the kids they work with, it’s a good thing. The mechanics of communicating that information in a consistent manner is the struggle.”

The school principals who responded to the final survey of the study often viewed these state efforts in the context of broader concerns about school safety. This principal noted: “Appreciate their efforts - with what is going on nationally, it is great to have support and plans for if an emergency would occur.” The national concentration on school safety was related to local actions, as expressed in this comment: “Legislative action defines parameters or needs we must address. More important impact are the violence issues in American high schools as reported in the news. This has had a positive impact on bringing students, staff, and parents together to develop pro-active plans to deal with safety.” Another principal identified a less favorable impact of the spotlight on school safety, writing that “I am finding that schools and law enforcement officials are increasingly cooperating with one another. I am concerned with the amount of legislative and media attention to seriously violent behavior. We see relatively little of this behavior and the attention, while in some cases necessary, I believe is contributing to an inaccurate perception of school being an unsafe, rather than a safe place for students.”

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Information Provided by the Juvenile Court: Respondents to the Juvenile Court survey provided a brief written description of how they notified schools when students were placed on diversion or had been adjudicated. These accounts included information about the frequency of notification, how quickly it followed court action, and whether the information was delivered in written form or over the telephone.

Notification was typically done in writing, often using computerized print-outs or a standardized list or form. Several respondents noted they used the JUVIS printout; others forwarded a copy of the court order or results of the disposition. Two counties, both small and rural, notified schools by telephone. A slight majority of Juvenile Courts (53%) provided this information to schools shortly after actions occurred – either doing so immediately following disposition or on a regular weekly basis. Two provided information bi-weekly. Several of these courts also sent schools a monthly JUVIS printout. Twelve counties responded that they sent out written reports to the schools on a monthly basis, also often using the JUVIS printout.

The questionnaire also asked if the court informed schools when students were admitted to or released from detention. This occurred in 80% of the counties. The probation officer/counselor, or a teacher or other staff members in the detention school made the contact with the schools. Information was typically exchanged with someone identified as the school contact, most often a school administrator or an attendance office staff person but also counselors and classroom teachers. When a student entered detention, the purpose of the contact was to obtain homework and other assignments to help the student stay current. It was not clear that contacts were as regularly made when the detention ended and the student was due to return to school. The comments suggest that information exchanges with the school did not necessarily occur when the stay in detention was brief.

Table 1 gives the responses from schools about the receipt of information from the courts.

The school safety legislation calls for the courts or law enforcement to notify the school principal when a student is convicted in adult court or diverted or adjudicated in juvenile court for crimes involving alcohol or other drugs, sexual or violent offenses, and malicious mischief. Does this occur in your school?

	Table 1 - NOTIFICATION BY COURT	
	School District (1998) N=144	School Principals (1999) N=175
Yes, regularly or routinely	42%	57%
Yes, but not regularly or routinely	29%	31%
Rarely or never	30%	12%

In the 1998 survey, school districts reported a mixed pattern of responsiveness to the legislation requirements for the courts or law enforcement to notify the school principal when a student is convicted, with just 42% answering that this occurred regularly or routinely. The smallest school districts were disproportionately likely to report not being notified: many of these small districts

were very rural and enrolled students K-8 only. Small to mid-size districts were most likely to report regular communication from the courts. In 1999, individual middle school/junior high and high school principals reported a more consistently favorable pattern of notification when a student is convicted or diverted, with a majority (57%) indicating this occurred regularly or routinely. There were no significant differences by school type in these responses but middle school/junior high principals were disproportionately likely to report being notified.

Court Information Passed on to School Staff: the school principal was assigned responsibility for passing information from the courts on to the student's classroom teachers and other school staff who might be considered relevant. Table 2 gives the responses from schools about the distribution of court information to school staff.

The legislation further calls for the school principal to provide this information about student convictions or diversion to all the student's teachers and other school personnel likely to be involved with the student. Does this occur in your school?

	Table 2 - PRINCIPAL INFORMS SCHOOL STAFF	
	School District (1998) N=140	School Principals (1999) N=179
Yes, regularly or routinely	56%	67%
Yes, but not regularly or routinely	29%	24%
Rarely or never	15%	9%

Districts reported considerable compliance in 1998 with the requirements for the school principal to provide information about student convictions in adult court or diversion or adjudication in juvenile court to the student's teachers and other school personnel. The larger the school district, the more likely this communication was to occur and to be a routine matter. In the 1999 survey of middle school/junior high and high school principals, routine transmission was considered even more likely, and two-thirds reported that this occurred regularly. Responses were similar for all school types. Earlier in the year, Juvenile Court administrators were asked if they believed this distribution of information occurred in their local schools. Most (53%) indicated they had no knowledge of what was done with the information they gave to schools, 36% thought that this occurred at least occasionally, and 12% felt that it happened rarely or never.

Information from Other Schools: The legislation states that information about disciplinary actions be included with the student's permanent record, and be sent promptly at the request of the school enrolling the student. As seen in Table 3, schools were least likely to receive information about a transferring student's previous involvement in violence or criminal behaviors from the student's former school.

The legislation calls for information to be provided in student records about a transferring student's previous involvement in violence or criminal behaviors. Has this information been included in the records sent to your schools from the transfer student's previous school?

	Table 3 – INFORMATION IN TRANSFER STUDENT RECORDS	
	School District (1998) N=136	School Principals (1999) N=171
Yes, regularly or routinely	24%	25%
Yes, but not regularly or routinely	42%	40%
Rarely or never	35%	35%

Both district administrators and school principals had similar responses to this question, and the circumstances of information exchange did not improve between 1998 and 1999. About two thirds of the Juvenile Courts reported they had helped school staff obtain this information for a new student entering the local schools from another district, although except for two counties, this was not done routinely. The remaining courts – 34% - reported this was done rarely or never. Court Administrators were unlikely to have been asked by schools or courts elsewhere to provide information about a former local student's involvement in violence or criminal behaviors when that student transferred to a school in another area: 37% indicated this had occurred but not regularly, with only one court responding that this happened on a routine basis.

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Respondents to the school district survey – conducted in 1998 - were asked to provide specific information about disciplinary actions taken in each school district. Collection of such data is called for in the legislation. There is, however, no required, standardized format for compiling these data, or specification of the details expected other than for weapons violations, nor is there any required reporting of this additional information. The school district questionnaire included a format to use to report these data, modeled after the information sought by the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee. Districts were requested to provide as much of the requested information as was available, and many aggregated these data for the first time to respond to this survey. Respondents had the alternative of using other formats that better fit their data collection efforts, and there were a variety of forms used for survey responses. Many of the forms submitted were incomplete or combined information across categories. All information was analyzed insofar as possible according to the format provided in the questionnaire.

Some 29% of the respondents to the district survey did not provide any data for this section of the questionnaire, with the greatest percentage of responses received on actions taken at the district level, and not differentiating between middle school/junior high and high school-aged students. Most actions (72%) involved males. Involvement of racial and ethnic minorities varied with school location and student characteristics.

There was enormous variation in the number of disciplinary actions reported by the districts. Much of this difference was a function of school size, with the number of incidents consistently

related to the number of students enrolled in district schools. Table 4 below gives 1998 survey responses from school district administrators on disciplinary actions, with these data sub-divided according to student enrollment in the reporting district.

Table 4 - DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS FOR 1997-98 SCHOOL YEAR										
District Totals By Student Enrollment										
District Size/ Student Enrollment	<i>Smallest</i> 378 or less (33%)		<i>Small</i> 401-1009 (19%)		<i>Medium</i> 1200-2555 (18%)		<i>Medium/Large</i> 2698-9021 (19%)		<i>Large</i> 10,388-32751 (11%)	
Disciplinary Actions	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Referrals for Alcohol Violations	1.6	-0-	2.7	1.0	6.3	3.0	13.4	14.5	33.0	22.5
Referrals for Drug Violations (not tobacco)	1.3	-0-	2.7	2.0	11.5	10.0	30.3	30.0	68.8	39.0
Referrals for Classroom Disruption	48.4	19.0	161	65.5	392.4	311.0	619.2	359.5	1301	991
Referrals for Fighting	5.9	3.0	16	10	60.8	56	113.7	109	395.5	280
Referrals for Threats/ Harassment	6.3	2.0	7.2	4.0	47.3	40	65.1	42	147.2	98.5
Referrals for Vandalism	2.1	-0-	4.1	2.0	13.9	11	18.8	16.5	47.1	29
# of Detentions	70.1	28.5	327.3	98	642.6	447	940.3	700.5	1543	1632
# of Short-Term Suspensions	18.3	4.0	45	39	200.7	147	497.4	417.5	1839	1296
# of Long-Term Suspensions	1.7	-0-	4.4	2.0	11.5	9.5	38.1	31.5	149.7	111
# of Expulsions	.55	-0-	1.2	-0-	3.7	2.0	23.5	10.5	67.7	55

All respondents, regardless of school district size, reported the greatest number of disciplinary actions occurring for classroom disruptions. This finding is consistent with their answers to the survey's first question about the importance of various disciplinary problems: 70% identified disruptive behavior in the classroom as a significant school safety problem. Disciplinary actions were least likely for alcohol violations, and in smaller districts, this also was true for drug violations. Medium and large districts were more likely to report higher numbers of disciplinary actions for drug violations, although these still remained proportionately fewer than for most other types of discipline issues.

The size of the districts also affected the types of sanctions used for these disciplinary infractions. Detention was the most likely response across all districts, but the likely use of short-term suspension increased disproportionately with student enrollment. A number of respondents noted that incidents of this type were rare in their small schools, were often dealt with informally, and students seldom needed to be suspended or expelled. Also, some of these smallest districts did not serve students of high school age. With higher student enrollments, and older students, school districts became much more likely to report encountering a number of disciplinary problems. Still, even given this greater likelihood of problem, larger school districts also seemed

more inclined than smaller ones to take formal action involving suspension and even expulsion from school in response.

In a separate question, the school district administrators reported the view that this and other recent legislative actions had not had a substantial impact on the number of student suspensions and expulsions in their schools over the past one to three years. A majority - 63% reported that suspensions and expulsions had stayed about the same, 23% that they had increased, usually slightly, and 16% that they had decreased, also mostly slightly.

The strategy for collecting information on disciplinary actions was modified for the 1999 survey of school principals. Respondents to this second school survey were asked to provide an assessment of change in the disciplinary actions taken in their schools, comparing referrals during the 1998-99 school year with those for 1996-97. The principals were not asked for specific details or counts of disciplinary actions for these years, but were requested simply to provide a judgement as to whether these were higher, the same, or lower than those two years previously. Table 5 below gives their responses.

Table 5 - DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS DURING 1998-99 SCHOOL YEAR COMPARED TO 1996-97									
Type of Action	Higher			Same			Lower		
	Total	MS	HS	Total	MS	HS	Total	MS	HS
Referrals for alcohol/ drug violations (173)	23%	23%	23%	57%	52%	59%	21%	25%	19%
Referrals for class- room disruption (175)	23%	32%	20%	49%	41%	53%	28%	27%	29%
Referrals for fighting (173)	9%	9%	11%	45%	50%	44%	46%	41%	44%
Referrals for threats/ harassment (174)	43%	45%	46%	41%	38%	43%	16%	18%	10%
Referrals for vandalism (171)	6%	4%	8%	50%	54%	48%	44%	43%	43%
Suspensions (173)	21%	29%	17%	53%	46%	59%	26%	25%	24%
Expulsions (170)	15%	16%	17%	55%	52%	57%	30%	32%	26%

In four of the discipline categories on the questionnaire, principals most often felt that disciplinary referrals were unchanged over the two-year period, and where there were changes, these were about evenly distributed between higher and lower numbers of referrals or responses. These data indicated no marked shift in disciplinary actions statewide since the implementation of the legislation and no dominant pattern of change for alcohol/drug violations, classroom disruption, suspensions, or expulsions.

The principals did report a pattern of change in some types of referrals. One area – referrals for threats/harassment – was more likely to be reported as greater for the 1998-99 school year than in

1996-97: 43% of the respondents noted an increase, a change that was cited by a majority of the larger high schools. Two areas of disciplinary referrals – fighting and vandalism – were more likely to have been reduced than to have increased: 46% and 44% cited a decrease in fighting; 44% saw a reduction in referrals for vandalism.

SCHOOL POLICIES

All districts responding to the 1998 survey (100%) reported that their current policies allowed classroom teachers to take corrective disciplinary action towards students who disrupt normal classroom activities; 97% reported that policies allow for the long-term suspension or expulsion of a student who repeatedly disrupts classes. Districts were less likely to have policies limiting student possession of pagers and/or portable or cellular telephones, although a majority (59%) reported these as well.

These district policies had, with few exceptions, been the subject of recent review and revision or such a review was in process. A majority (56%) had last reviewed their discipline policies in the 1997-98 school year, 9% in 1996-97, and 26% planned such a review in the current school year. Just 9% had not reviewed discipline policies in the past two years.

In all, 60% of the respondents definitely felt that their district's present policies adequately addressed issues related to school safety, 37% felt that this was somewhat true, and a scant 3% felt school safety issues were not adequately covered by their policies. Districts expressing a more moderate level of satisfaction were disproportionately those who had not yet or not recently revised their discipline policies. The 1999 survey of school principals asked the same question about satisfaction with district policies. The principals were less likely to agree that these policies fully met school safety needs: just 42% of the respondents definitely felt that their district's present policies adequately address issues related to school safety. Still, 49% of the principals felt that this was somewhat true and policies were generally adequate; 10% felt school safety issues were not adequately covered by district policies.

Given the recent emphasis on development of individual school building safety and crisis response plans, the 1999 survey asked school principals if there was such a plan at their schools. Most principals (76%) reported that there was a school violence prevention and crisis response plan in place for their building. For 56%, this plan was current while for 20% it needed updating. Three quarters of the schools without a plan were in the process of developing one. Alternative schools were least likely to have a current plan. Having a current school safety plan was related to greater satisfaction with district safety policies.

The principals also gave their school a rating for its capacity to prevent and intervene in violent or aggressive student behaviors: 21% rated their school as excellent, 55% as good, 21% as fair, and 3% as poor. A majority of the respondents (62%) felt that the teachers and other staff at their schools had adequate training in violence prevention, but 91% of these also felt additional training would be helpful: 38% did not feel their school's staff were adequately trained.

Principals who felt their staff were not adequately trained tended to also rate their school's capacity to respond to student violence less favorably.

ADDITIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY STRATEGIES

Educational Options for Expelled or Suspended Students: The study's purposes specifically called for collection of information about the educational program or opportunities schools provide to students who have been suspended or expelled. A majority (50%) of the districts responding to the 1998 survey provided students who were suspended or expelled two or more alternatives for keeping studies current. Three-quarters (76%) provided homework and self-study materials, with this being the only option for about one-third of the districts; 50% offered an alternative educational program; 27% had a structured support program for home study; and 29% gave assistance with high school completion for older youth.

Strategies to Improve School Security: The 1999 survey of school principals asked if schools were using one or more of several common programs or approaches to preventing and intervening in school violence. These were selected from strategies identified in written comments on the 1998 school district survey as well as from school security approaches featured in the research literature and the media.

The most frequent approaches used to improve school security were school security aides (cited by 48%) and on-duty law enforcement officers or School Resource Officers (reported by 32%). Fewer schools made use of video surveillance cameras (21%) or routine locker searches (17%). Over one-quarter (28%) of the principals reported that they utilized none of these security strategies. High schools (and larger schools) were more likely to have both school security aides and School Resource Officers as well as to use video surveillance. Only locker searches were more likely to be used in smaller schools. Larger schools were significantly more likely to have some of these security features in place than were smaller schools, which often had none of these specific security features.

Prevention and Intervention Programs: Principals also were asked if their schools had any of several standard student prevention and intervention programs. A majority of the schools offered anger management (62%) and conflict resolution training (56%), and 47% indicated they used peer mediation. About a fifth of the schools (22%) utilized Second Step or some other violence prevention program, and 26% wrote in some other approach, most often counseling, a support group, life skills, or Natural Helper program. Smaller schools were more likely to have some type of prevention program such as Second Step; larger schools were more likely to have conflict resolution training or peer mediation.

DIFFICULTIES IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION

Time and Resources: School district superintendents and Juvenile Court administrators were specifically asked for an account of any difficulties encountered or anticipated in implementing the legislation and its several requirements. This question was open-ended in the 1998 School district survey. Seventy-five percent of the respondents answered the question, with about one-third of these indicating they had encountered or expected no difficulties. Of the two-thirds who did note some problems, several cited concerns about confidentiality, others brought up difficulties dealing with special education students, and a number expressed frustration with “unfunded mandates” by the Legislature. The latter concern involved costs for tracking and monitoring discipline problems as well as expenses associated with obtaining and managing information from other schools and the courts. Several respondents summed this problem up as “time and resources.”

Appreciative comments about the legislation were often accompanied by critiques about the costs and difficulties associated with effective implementation. “Providing the clout to act when needed was long overdue,” concludes this respondent, adding, “the ‘red tape’ of paperwork creates a hardship.” This respondent effectively summarizes this view: “legislation that helps to create/maintain safe schools is always helpful, especially when needed resources accompany legislation. Additional dollars to fund alternate programs for suspended and expelled students would improve school climate and reduce violence.”

Juvenile Court administrators responded to a structured question about the time required to provide information to the schools. A slight majority of respondents found the time was not particularly burdensome, although 42% agreed that, while not a big problem, it did require additional time; 14% responded that providing information did not require much time. A sizeable minority of the respondents – 45% - felt there was at least some burden due to the time necessary, with two (6%) feeling this was a major problem requiring significant additional time. Many of the comments or concerns repeated the issues raised in this request for identification of problems related to implementation. Several cited unfunded impacts on workloads and concerns about costs and payment responsibility. As this administrator remarked “Some are helpful and contribute to schools and justice system communication. But does impact work loads without funding.” Another pointed out how “each law that appears to be low cost continues to drain staff time at the county level and in the schools.”

The study’s last survey of school principals incorporated the question seeking information about problems with implementation into a general request for comments about the legislation. Most comments addressed other issues, but many school principals also used this opportunity to identify similar problems with funding for extra time and workload.

As summarized by this high school principal, “Any implementation burden placed on the school without staffing/funding takes resources away from teaching and learning.” This view was echoed in this comment from a junior high administrator: “The idea is great. Finding time and money to implement is difficult.” In their concluding comments, most respondents also felt there were some shortcomings with the legislation, or as stated by this principal, “Good intentions,

poor implementation.” Another wrote “Safety and security is a new area of responsibility for teachers and administrators. We need time and resources for in service. Increased safety practices and higher expectations for student learning is stretching the system.” Several respondents pointed out the problems basing funding for safety programs on enrollment in very small schools.

Court survey respondents also were asked to identify any other difficulties, besides the extra time, that they had encountered or anticipated in implementing the legislation and its several requirements. Fifty-six percent (56%) of the respondents identified some other problems or concerns with the legislation. A few respondents expressed concerns about the types of offenses identified as reportable, questioning why some were required and others, such as theft, were not. Several respondents added to their previous response about time requirements with comments about unfunded legislative mandates and budget and funding cuts putting pressures on staff time. One Court administrator from a larger county noted the difficulties associated with diversity: “One juvenile court and many schools means different practices from school to school, different levels of investment, problems with communication, etc.”

Information Across Systems: other than funding needs, the 1998 comments from school district administrators identified difficulties tracking and exchanging information between separate systems – including both other schools and the juvenile justice system. Wrote one district administrator, “It is very difficult for various agencies to communicate as a routine when the student is generally transient in nature. Tracking between systems is very difficult.” Another was more categorical: “Information from previous schools and/or juvenile courts or other agencies is incomplete or non-existent.” Several respondents cited difficulties getting information from previous schools, indicating that obtaining disciplinary data often required a specific request and the investment of staff time. It may be, as one respondent pointed out, that “some schools still are not aware that they must share this information.”

Communication with the courts system also presented problems for numerous school district respondents, as in the following comment: “Courts do not provide the information – and there is nothing the school district can do about it.” Another respondent noted that “Timely notification is a problem. A student may be in detention and the school will not be notified immediately.” The difference between the schools and the courts as distinctive systems was an implicit issue in the identification of many of these problems, summed up by this respondent: “The courts and law enforcement are not in practice or procedure to work and communicate with schools.”

In 1999, principals seldom cited communication problems, and these generally dealt with problems getting information about students from other schools. Communication with the courts was infrequently raised as a problem, and several principals expressed how helpful the legislation had been towards improving information exchange with the juvenile justice system.

Confidentiality: Issues around confidentiality and the circulation of sensitive information were the most frequently identified additional concerns by Juvenile Court administrators, with several asking for clearer policies on the distribution of information among school staff. Others felt that too much information was going out without careful controls on who received it at the school.

Respondents particularly singled out reports on diversion participants, noting this was a process supposed to be confidential. A few court respondents identified problems with retaliatory school actions following notification by the courts. Wrote one respondent “Some schools in our county will kick a youth off of athletic teams if he enters diversion for MIP, etc., even when the offense occurred during the summer. Youth is punished twice.” Another court administrator added that there were “too many casual calls from schools fishing for dirt on kids and families.”

Other comments at the end of the court survey repeated previously identified issues associated with confidentiality and information sharing. One respondent wrote: “I think this has destroyed the confidentiality of the diversion process. Once that info hits the school building, it’s all over – no matter how many times you stamp ‘confidential’ all over the letter.” Another remarked “Diversions should be confidential,” adding the suggestion that “All felonies should require notification.”

The most extended comment provided a detailed analysis of shortcomings in the legislation. Beginning with the statement that the legislation was “not particularly helpful,” the Juvenile Court administrator went on to iterate concerns about impacts on youth in diversion and other concerns about inappropriate use of the information. Finding these exchanges not always “informative” or “useful,” the respondent suggested the advantages of a clear identification of the purpose and desired outcomes of these contacts and the need for clear parameters on information sharing. Included as well were references to schools not always responding to requests for information about educational specifics.

The 1999 survey of school principals explicitly followed-up these concerns about breaches of confidentiality of the court provided information. Respondents were asked if they had experienced or anticipated any difficulties ensuring that the information they provided to teachers and other school personnel remained confidential. Views about the protection of confidentiality were approximately evenly distributed between the expectation that this was not and would not be violated and the expectation or experience of this information being distributed more widely than intended. Several of the principals who felt that confidentiality would be maintained reported steps taken to ensure this, noting that staff were regularly trained and informed about confidentiality requirements and expectations. For some, assurance of confidentiality was attributed to the professionalism of the school’s staff.

Some of those who expressed no concern about confidentiality explained this view as a belief that the information would be known by other routes in any case, citing the small size of their communities, the tendency of students to talk among themselves, and a student’s reputation. A similar rationale was used by many of the principals who were concerned about breaches of confidentiality. These respondents also cited community size, gossip, and student comments, as seen in this statement: “It never stays confidential in a small town – everybody knows everybody’s business.” These respondents identified as well that papers would be left on desks, files were insecure, teachers would talk among themselves, and that teachers and other staff would sometimes talk in the community.

Several principals pointed out how the need to pass on information to staff about students inevitably creates a confidentiality risk. “There is always a risk as the number of people with knowledge increases,” wrote one high school principal. Noted another, “Yes, human nature.” A few respondents characterized the “balancing act” required between trying to protect students and employees while also offering the student an education. It was felt to be important to pass information on to staff but this was accompanied by an increased potential that the confidentiality of such information would be compromised.

CONTINUING SCHOOL SAFETY CONCERNS

SIGNIFICANT SCHOOL SAFETY PROBLEMS

Each of the survey instruments began with a list of the school safety concerns from the legislation and asked respondents to identify which of these were felt to be significant problems in the schools in their district. Responses are given in Table 6.

	Table 6 - SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS		
	School District N=148	School Principals N=182	Juvenile Courts N=29
Disruptive Behavior in Classroom	70%	68%	83%
Harassment of Students & School Staff	41%	52%	66%
Violence or Threats Directed at Other Students & School Staff	37%	38%	76%
Use of Drugs & Alcohol on Campus	38%	37%	59%
Sales of Drugs & Alcohol on Campus	21%	21%	52%
Gang Related Apparel & Regalia	16%	12%	21%
Gang Recruitment & Intimidation	13%	8%	41%
Other Discipline-Related Issues	18%	30%	19%

“Disruptive behavior in the classroom” was the most likely problem selected by all districts, and was picked by a majority across all size categories. Respondents from the smallest schools were least likely to identify this as an issue (53%) while the largest districts were most likely to do so (80%). Among school principals, this problem was especially true for middle schools/junior highs (83%), but less significant for alternative schools (38%).

Other significant problems included “harassment of students and school staff,” “use of drugs and alcohol on campus,” and “violence or threats directed at other students and school staff,” but these were selected less frequently. Among district respondents, smaller school districts were least likely to select these problems, with drug/alcohol problems (including sales, selected by 21%) disproportionately likely to be issues for the largest districts. In the view of school principals, harassment was most associated with middle schools/junior highs (63%), and least likely in alternative schools (25%). Principals of very large schools were disproportionately likely to view violence or threats to students and staff as problems, with this identified as a concern by 66% of the 29 high schools with over 1200 students. These principals also tended to identify alcohol and other drug problems as significant. Substance use problems also were

associated with older students, selected by 45% of the high schools and 42% of the alternative schools, but just 21% of the middle schools and junior highs.

Overall, larger schools and larger school districts were more likely to identify all the problems listed as being concerns while smaller schools or school districts tended to limit identified problems to classroom disruption. Juvenile Court administrators were most likely to see all the issues listed as being significant, and were very much more concerned about gang-related violence than either district administrators or school principals, even those from large high schools.

School district respondents identified several other behavioral problems that were noted as issues in other areas of the questionnaire. Most of these concerned one of the following: 1) problems responding to disruptive behaviors by special education students; 2) truancy and attendance; and 3) negative or disrespectful attitudes among students and parents. The school principals also identified several other behavioral problems that were noted as issues in other areas of the questionnaire as well. Most of these concerned the same issues as identified by district administrators the previous year. Several principals also expressed concern about drug/alcohol use off campus. Principals of alternative schools were most likely to specify some other school safety problem.

School district respondents were asked to write in which of these behaviors was considered to be the single most significant disciplinary problem. Most respondents described disruptive behaviors in the classroom and on campus, followed by harassment or violence towards students and staff. The question was reworded to improve the clarity of response in the next two surveys. Asked to identify which of these behaviors was considered to be the single most significant disciplinary problem, most school principals (53%) also selected disruptive behaviors in the classroom and on campus. The next likely response picked by 21% -- was harassment or violence towards students and staff. The ranking of problems was similar among Juvenile Court administrators: 42% of the respondents picked disruptive behaviors in the classroom and on campus; 15% harassment or violence towards students and staff. Court administrators were more likely to rank other problems as being the most significant than were their counterparts in the schools: 15% selected use of drugs and alcohol on campus; others selected violence or threats directed at other students and staff (12%) or gang recruitment and intimidation (9%).

PROGRAM AND FUNDING NEEDS

The school principal's survey included a question about what else they would like to do or obtain to further ensure school safety. Most respondents identified multiple needs. Many of the respondents identified specific needs for security equipment, such as cameras or lights, with these often linked to needs for more security staff or a law enforcement officer on campus. One high school principal called for, "Ongoing staff training in recognizing, preventing, and de-escalating potentially violent students. Ongoing training in identifying and implementing resiliency factors." Another principal offered three such concrete suggestions: "1) Funds to be used to place emergency phones in all classrooms; 2) A toll-free 1-800 number for students and

parents to use to forewarn school of possible concerns; 3) Video cameras in place all around the school and parking areas.

The following comment both identified such needs and questioned how these are presently being addressed. "Additional state funding for programs related to violence prevention and preparedness for crises. If these issues are truly important, they should be financially supported." Another common request was for additional staff training and development, with funding to support this and planning for security needs. Several respondents also listed a wish for student programs, specifically citing more training in conflict resolution, additional counselors, and support for programs to encourage student involvement and responsibility. This theme of funding for priority concerns appeared several times in these comments, with the call for "State funding not in the form of competitive grants," and another request of "Funding for additional SRO time." Increased security services were also a focus of suggestions for improvements in school safety from school district respondents, most often in reference to use of a school resource or security officer. A number of districts had received funding from either the state or a federal program for such an officer and cited this as particularly beneficial.

School principals identified how important it was that legislation be accompanied by other assistance: "We need the laws, but; - we need help with ideas and programs that work - we need funding for training, planning and implementation - we need time for training, planning and implementation. Wrote another, "Being safe at school is paramount to all of us who learn and teach here. More efforts should come from the state to inform, train, and guarantee our safety." Other principals called for improvements in "...the intervention programs available to students who have been identified and exhibit tendencies toward violence."

In 1998, the district administrators also suggested some specific ways in which additional funding would improve school safety and security. These called for additional resources for general as well as several specific prevention and intervention programs and services. Specific requests included more counselors and staff support positions, increases in drug/alcohol intervention and anger management and conflict resolution training, and more access to community and family programs for all students. The need for alternative education programs and difficulties with the Becca bill underscored several of these suggestions. "We need more dollars for alternative education and stronger mandates from the legislature," wrote one such respondent.

For small school districts, there was further confirmation that many are not always touched by the school safety issues that affect larger districts and which prompted the legislation. When they are affected, however, one respondent pointed out that smaller districts are at a particular disadvantage in meeting legislative requirements without additional funding. School principals also raised this same complaint of the disadvantages associated with smaller enrollments. Fewer students make services such as a school resource officer more expensive per capita, and when program funds are based on enrollment, there may be too little funding available to support a functional program or support needed personnel.

Several comments by Juvenile Court administrators offered other specific suggestions to improve actions relating to school safety. These included interest in capacity to act preventatively, noting “there should be some mechanism to allow sharing of information before kids are in the system. Schools generally can recognize potential problems but are limited in sharing of that information until it is too late.” Others suggested placing probation officers or police in the schools and faster judicial action on new charges.

NEEDS FOR LEGISLATIVE OR ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE

Special Education Students: In the 1998 survey, several school district superintendents identified problems enforcing disciplinary standards with special education students due to what one called “unequal discipline procedures for 504 –ADD, BD students who are violent.” This issue was first identified in descriptive accounts of significant student safety problems, recurred in comments on difficulties implementing the legislation, and was featured again in the final section seeking additional information about experiences, impacts, and problems. As reported in these survey responses, students with an Individualized Education Plan on the basis of their behaviors, e.g. as behaviorally disturbed (BD), cannot be excluded from the school because of this behavior. This greater difficulty in taking disciplinary action was an especially troubling problem for school principals who may want to expel a violent student to address school safety concerns, but cannot do so due to that student’s status.

This lengthy and detailed suggestion from one middle school principal covered the substance of this need and its significance: “A change in legislation as it applies to students with IEPs (Special Education classification) and 504 plans. As the law currently exists, students in these categories have ‘protections’ from appropriate disciplinary actions that in cases of threats, disruptions and violence limits the school’s ability to ensure a safe environment for all students. This is a HUGE issue!” A related suggestion asked for additional funding to support alternative education for violent students, a need which was not seen as well supported by general education.

The principals also cited issues associated with special education students among difficulties with implementation. Although praising the legislation’s intent, the following respondent also found shortcomings: “The legislative action has been long in coming. It has been helpful. We need to change the laws related to special education students in relation to violence, gang involvement, harassment and weapons. We need total support of the legal system to eliminate the violent student from our schools.” Wrote another principal in a similar vein: “In general, these measures have been helpful and supportive. Special ed laws, concerns about confidentiality, and due process, and the sensitivity around everyone’s ‘rights’ make this a challenging situation.”

School Security Grants: Many of the respondents to the two school surveys expressed the view that the provision of adequate security on campuses should be part of regular funding, and not the result of a competitive grants process as it is currently. Wrote one district respondent: “Hired a security person. Very helpful! There should be a state funding formula that addresses safety as part of basic education.” Another school district administrator pointed out the “need for per

capita funding for campus security and violence reduction programs.” This following respondent made a similar call for regular rather than grants-based funding, concluding that “I feel with the concern nationally regarding safety – it should be a #1 focus of our legislators and congress. Schools should be the safest places our students can be.”

Principals also expressed strong opinions about the distribution of security funds through competitive grants. This respondent pointed out how “Most of the enhancements we would like to see in the safety and security arena are hindered by lack of funding. Our second security officer is due to a state grant. He makes a HUGE difference.” Another principal had similar experiences, reporting that “I’m fairly ambivalent about the overall impact of legislative efforts. Our school district had done a remarkable job in its attempt to improve school safety and security. The problem is one of resources and negative financial implications on district budgets. School safety and security funding should be part of the state’s funding of basic education.”

One principal posed the question: “If school safety is a high priority for ALL SCHOOLS, why offer competitive grants to help fund security or safe school programs?” As another principal categorically stated, “Safety grants should not be a competitive process.” Concluded yet another: “All schools have needs, so fund the needs.”

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

E2SHB 1841 was designed to improve the capacity for schools to respond to and reduce the educational impacts of disruptive behavior in classrooms and on campus. The legislation aimed to provide educators with the authority to restore discipline and safety in the classroom and better control the conduct of students on school grounds. For this study of the legislation’s impacts on schools and Juvenile Courts, these core aims were stated as four major purposes: 1) Information; 2) Right to Take Disciplinary Actions; 3) Policies to Support Disciplinary Actions; and 4) School Safety Plans. In the more than two years following the adoption of E2SHB 1841, various other legislative and administrative actions as well as heightened public and school concerns have added impetus to these purposes. Such ensuing changes in the climate for school safety actions make it impossible to assess the impacts of this single piece of legislation. What can be concluded, however, is how the aims of the legislation have or have not been realized according to the information compiled for the study.

The conclusions of the Study of School Safety Legislation are summarized according to three categories. First, there is a discussion of effects on the schools’ capacity to deal with disruptive students and respond to potential violence. This covers the topics of classroom disruption and disciplinary actions as well as school policies and plans. It concludes with a recommendation for reviewing legislation applying to disciplinary actions affecting special education students. Secondly, the conclusions review how information from the Juvenile Courts is provided to the schools and how the legislation raises some concerns about the violation of confidentiality. The recommendation following this deals with communication about students involved with diversion. Finally, there is an examination of costs due to implementation of the legislation as well as costs and needs associated with implementing related school safety programs and

responses. It is recommended that expectations for school safety actions be associated with more reliable and more evenly distributed mechanisms of support.

DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

The strongest indications of specific effects from E2SHB 1841 were in regard to the capacity of schools and school staffs to respond to disruptive actions by students. Written comments by school district administrators and school principals cited how the legislation “backed up” a strong position against disruptive students. The legislation appears to have given schools a necessary reference for the right to take a disciplinary stand to deal with harassment, violence, and other unacceptable actions on campus.

The school survey responses also reveal how strongly superintendents and principals felt about the significance of disruptive students as a school safety problem, and how this problem continues despite the legislation. Thus, although much legislative and public attention about school safety has been devoted to gangs, violence, and drugs, school personnel themselves were more concerned about classroom management. The legislation gave schools more tools to use to manage disruptive students, but the presence of such students remained a major issue for school administrators. Harassment of other students and staff was another major and persistent issue. Juvenile Court administrators agreed with school administrators on the primacy of these two concerns but also identified other more serious and criminal activities as being significant school safety issues as well. The legislation has also served as impetus and compliment to other initiatives driving the development of district level school safety policies and individual school safety plans.

In the two-year period available for review in this study, there may have been some shifts in school disciplinary actions that were influenced by this legislation as well as by other factors. There were reports of increases in school actions taken against students who threatened or harassed others. Recent events have undoubtedly contributed to support for a more pro-active approach to student harassment but it is likely that the legislation also provided school staff a stronger foundation on which to justify taking this approach in such incidents. Reductions in school reports of disciplinary actions taken against students for fighting may be a partial consequence of dealing more aggressively with verbal disputes, as above. This might in addition be the result of more rapid removal of potentially violent students from the classroom and campus, actions that were supported by the legislation.

This capacity to take swift disciplinary responses to early indications of student violence was perceived by many school survey respondents to be least effective in regard to special education students. School principals particularly stressed the difficulties of implementing the legislative intent in the case of students attending school with an Individualized Education Plan. Their position describes a conflict between adherence to the specific process protections afforded students with a special education designation – especially when this is for a behavioral disorder – and the equally compelling needs to take actions when any student poses a threat of violence or is disruptive. Several school administrators called for changes in legislation to permit capacity for disciplinary actions to be equivalent for all students, regardless of their status.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Review the regulations that apply to disciplinary actions for special education students to identify how these might interfere with the capacity for school administrators to take recommended actions to respond to students who are disruptive or pose threats of violence to other students or school staff. Following this review, consider supporting legislation or other changes that would improve school safety for all students, regardless of their status.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONDUCT

The primary aspects of the legislation were largely fully and successfully implemented throughout the state. The Juvenile Courts have all developed a means of communicating with schools and a majority of school districts and school principals responding to the surveys were satisfied with the information about students they received from the courts. This communication appears to have become more routine and was identified as more productive in the second year following the legislation, suggesting that some initial difficulties with implementation have been resolved. Exchange of disciplinary information among schools about transfer students is less regular, often requiring the receiving school to specifically request these data. Such a request may be unlikely unless some risk or problem was identified. Over time, this situation is expected to be improved as school staff come to count on and expect disciplinary information to be incorporated with the student's permanent record.

The Juvenile Courts were most likely to note specific adverse impacts associated with implementation of the legislation. Most reported some additional time requirements, and more than half cited a burden associated with the increased time and effort required for staff to comply with the school reporting requirements. While an apparently modest demand, such increases could pose a problem if courts are already understaffed or over-whelmed with other paperwork requirements. The procedures used to report to schools made extensive use of pre-existing report formats, and often occurred infrequently. This latter schedule did pose a problem for some schools, with survey respondents claiming that information from the courts was delayed or not received in a timely manner. This issue was more likely to be raised in 1998 than in 1999, and may reflect first-year implementation problems.

It would be optimal for critical information about students and their court involvement to be transmitted to the schools as soon as possible after the actions, so the schools could respond rapidly if this was indicated. It is also the case that many schools and courts reported mutually satisfactory and variable arrangements for communicating about students. Requiring standardization of reporting procedures would reduce the flexibility that is part of such arrangements, and could potentially interfere with their effectiveness.

Within the school itself, school principals reported that they generally routinely passed on information from the courts to a student's teachers and other school staff. In this sense, the implementation of the legislation has also been satisfactory. Juvenile Court administrators raised the concern that information transmitted about students on diversion was contradictory to that

program's promise of confidentiality. Of even greater concern, they reported on several incidents in which diversion information had been mis-used by schools and questioned how confidential such data was. Their descriptions of how information about students was sent to schools suggested that recipients ranged from school administrators to secretarial staff, and the courts seldom had any assurance that the confidentiality of this information was protected once it was received at the school.

Schools principals provided additional reasons for concern about the confidentiality of juvenile justice records once provided to the school. Although some principals expressed confidence in the integrity of their staff and attempted to ensure this with training and reminders, an equal number believed that information about student convictions and diversions was likely to be inappropriately circulated. Although some of these breaches of confidentiality were attributed to "human nature," others were projected to occur as a result of carelessness and lack of provision for maintenance of security. School classrooms are not uniformly equipped to protect student records, and distribution of sensitive information to teachers and other staff poses inevitable risks. These risks are considered uncomfortably high. In the case of diversion, there is some reason to question whether inclusion of this status among information to be provided by the court is not in itself already a violation of confidentiality protections.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Consider supporting amendments that would provide for stronger confidentiality protections for juvenile justice information and its distribution within the school setting, and, in the case of diversion agreements, remove these from the types of offenses Juvenile Courts are required to report to school principals.

SUPPORT FOR OTHER SCHOOL SAFETY PROGRAMS

These legislative actions and their effects on the exercise of school discipline and the development of school safety policies and plans are only part of how Washington's schools have responded to student disruption and potential for school violence. Most school districts and individual schools have other school safety strategies. These often included one or more provisions to increase security, ranging from locker checks in smaller schools to metal detectors in larger schools. Many schools had hired security aides to increase monitoring of student behavior and provide more routine disciplinary sanctions. Many had also aligned themselves with local law enforcement agencies, and supported the presence of a uniformed School Resource Officer on the school campus. There has been increased state and federal funding for these latter security measures in the past several years through competitive grant awards. School survey respondents strongly objected to the need to compete for, and perhaps fail to receive, what is increasingly viewed as a necessary adjunct to other school staff. They also took issue with the usual loss of these security resources following the grant period, and how this discontinuity affected their capacity to ensure effective school security responses.

School survey respondents raised a similar issue of competition for scarce and necessary resources to support costs associated with prevention and intervention programs, staff training, and security planning and implementation. Each and all such program initiatives were seen as

desired additions to school safety capacities, and were often identified as crucial aspects of any effective school safety improvement. While some small schools indicated they had infrequent needs for any school safety intervention, others cited the disadvantages they faced in trying to put together a functional program within enrollment-based resource limitations.

The point of these issues for the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee is an important one, since its members also award competitive grant funding for similar or related programs. What many schools wanted and their administrators felt they needed was equity in the distribution of resources for what are considered to be basic or the most effective security programs. Many also sought greater investments in prevention and intervention efforts and some assurance of continuation in funding support for both. Insofar as school safety is considered to be a necessary aspect of education, the capacities to provide it should be equally available to every school. This does not mean that security arrangements and safety programming should be the same in every school. Survey respondents emphasized the importance of unique local needs and circumstances, and it is clear that all schools do not have equal problems.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Consider support for establishment of basic minimal standards for school safety programs, similar to those promoted for school policies and including both security and prevention/intervention strategies, applicable to all schools in the state.